

Modi Tells PMG to Monitor Bullet Train Project

New Delhi: The Project Monitoring Group (PMG) in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) will work with the Maharashtra and Gujarat governments as well as central ministries and other entities to ensure that the ₹1.08-lakh-crore bullet train project is completed by its advanced deadline of August 2022.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has tasked the PMG with monitoring the 508-km-long Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail project at an April 25 PRAGATI review meeting — he takes stock of the progress of mega projects at these meetings. This will be the biggest project to be coordinated by the PMG, a core group inside the PMO.

At last week's meeting, the PM directed Gujarat and Maharashtra to complete land acquisition for the project by this year-end so that construction work could start. The PMG will liaison with both state governments, central and state agencies including environmental departments and the National High Speed Rail Corporation Ltd (NHSRCL) to remove any hindrance that could come in the way of the project.

"The Japanese side has shown us a draft 'Major Implementation Programme' for the project," a senior government official told ET, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

The PMG will soon begin meetings with both the state govts and NHSRCL to ensure the project proceeds at the correct pace

Government officials flagged three issues that the PMG has been asked to focus upon. The most important aspect is land acquisition. Land has to be acquired in 12 districts — eight in Maharashtra, three in Gujarat and one in Dadra and Nagar Haveli.

"Nearly 1,400 hectares of land is required for the project, comprising nearly 7,900 plots of land; 1,100 hectares are private land while 300 hectare are forest land," an official said. Maharashtra

has reportedly assured the PM that it will acquire all land for the project by the end of this year.

Land is required to be acquired in 102 villages in Maharashtra and the state has reported "good progress" in all districts but one, Palghar, the official said. "About 100 km of alignment of the project passes through Palghar where there is considerable public resistance in villages to land acquisition ... Maharashtra was told this is a crucial aspect of the project and the PMG will coordinate with their efforts," he said.

The second issue was land required for the underground station at the Bandra Kurla Exhibition Grounds in Mumbai. But in a major breakthrough, the Maharashtra government allotted the land for the project just ahead of the review meeting on April 25, another senior official said.

Gujarat has also given the go-ahead for another important part of the project, the High-Speed Rail Institute to come up in Vadodara. "In fact, Gujarat has already done the Section 11 notification for major part of the land acquisition in six out of the eight districts in the state in which 650 hectares of land is required," the official said. As much as 349 km of the high-speed rail line passes through Gujarat and 154 km through Maharashtra.

The PMG will soon begin meetings with both the state governments and NHSRCL to ensure the project proceeds at the correct pace, he added.

The third issue is environmental clearances for 77 hectares of forest land and both states and the environment ministry have to work on this.